

# HRD

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“GRAB AI - PILOT IT, EXPERIMENT  
WITH IT - AND THEN VALUE AND  
UTILISE THE TIME IT AFFORDS  
FOR THINKING”

FLORIAN BOSCH  
REGIONAL HR DIRECTOR, EUROPE  
HOWDEN





ARTICLE BY DR LEANDRO HERRERO, CHIEF ORGANISATIONAL ARCHITECT & CEO -  
THE CHALFONT PROJECT AND THE LEANDRO HERRERO INSTITUTE

# ALIEN REPORT

"AT THIS RATE, THE ALIEN MIGHT BE HIRED BY A CONSULTING GROUP  
IN THE CITY, "THE ALIEN DID VERY WELL AT THE INTERVIEW, HAVING  
PROMISED TO KILL SOME COMPETITORS"

*If an alien came to Earth from another planet and analysed the language of business, they would hear hostile parlance, "kill the competition, win the battle, take no prisoners, defend your turf, target the enemy, deploy resources, guerilla tactics, launch an offensive, the war room, arm yourself with data, strategic strike, raise the white flag, conquer new markets, outmanoeuvre the enemy, here's the battle plan and fight on multiple fronts". The diagnosis would be immediate, 'these people are at war'!*

If our extraterrestrial visitor tuned in to another business meeting, they might hear about; "the game plan, play offense, stay on the sidelines, level the playing field, home run, in the big league, it's a marathon not a sprint, on the bench, step up to the plate, take a shot, keep your eye on the ball, out of bounds, team player of course, drop the ball, full-court press, take first base and tackle a problem. 'It's either war or sports here on Earth', the alien would report, 'let's postpone the invasion, there seems to be some sort of strange evolution here'. If the alien had spent a little more time here, he might also have noticed other secondary languages applied to organisational life, the medical one, "diagnosing the problem, healing the company, treat the

symptoms and surgical precision - or the construction one "laying the foundation, building a brand and blueprint for success. Or even a maritime one, 'steer the ship, navigate rough waters, drop anchor and sail into uncharted territory" and so on. It would report back again with a deeper understanding, 'the people here use something they call metaphors. Please extend my time and hold off on the invasion, it is not as straightforward as we thought'. At this rate, the alien might be hired by a consulting group in the City, "the alien did very well at the interview, having promised to kill some competitors". Over time, our friend would wonder who is in charge, humans or machines and he would ascertain that businesses are big machine that contained

people, who thought that they controlled the machine.

The key issue seemed to be; performance, high performance, low performance and bad performance, etc. It would indeed be a strange anthropological field study of Earth people. Of course, the machine would continue to intrigue and soon it learnt about employee engagement, which was about to be replaced by employee satisfaction - which replaced employee happiness - something that was short-lived. Soon, the alien learnt that the idea of having a high employee engagement, was to do with productivity. Whatever this engagement was, it wasn't good or bad in itself, only in so far as the machine had better or worse productivity. There

was also something called 'deliverables' or 'to deliver', a language it had thought was similar to pizza delivery. The alien had become very fond of pizzas and practically lived on them. Once during a meeting, the alien mentioned that a particular issue on the table lacked 'a bit of pepperoni', but people looked at it in a strange way, so it dropped that language immediately. 'On the one hand, people use metaphors' but they also lacked a sense of humour'. One day, out of the blue, an internal conference was arranged in the office under the title 'Systems Thinking for high performance organisations'. It was intriguing enough to attend and the alien took copious notes - all is interconnected, cause and effect cannot be established, reductionism is flawed, the system itself will create the environment and even a strange statement from the speaker 'we are not a machine'. The conference was well attended and his colleagues were happy and cheerful, having heard something 'fresh and different', as some of them said. Very soon, the adoption of the language was subtle but progressive, colleagues started calling things systemic or systematic - also complex and complicated, with long discussions over lunch on the differences. It felt new and promising, but it didn't last a quarter - the alien had learnt that the unit of time was not the day, the month or the year, but something called a quarter. Something else that was noted, in fact the subject of one of the most comprehensive reports back to the extraterrestrial masters, was how some brain capacities were so truly dominant, but not all. The alien had attended an evening class on the human brain, but not much was said at the time. People were obsessed with 'making things simple' and 'reduced to a minimal version'. For example, our chronicler had been asked to provide 'one pagers' of this and that and, in some cases 'an elevator pitch'. But all the people in the elevators of the firm were silent, looking ahead and holding a bad cappuccino from the downstairs coffee shop. That intrigued from day one, but a pattern emerged. It wasn't an isolated

language metaphor again, but a whole other language that contained things like; "the net-net, the bottom line, three take aways, executive summary, bullet points, KISS (keep it simple stupid) and ubiquitous quick wins". All was compressed and packaged - three steps, eight phases and ten traits, etc. - it felt as if part of the brain was in charge of packaging, unpackaging and repackaging.

"THE BY-NOW  
ACCULTURATED ALIEN LEFT  
THE CONSULTANCY FIRM  
- FOR REASONS NEVER  
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MANUAL"

The next interim report included sentences such as, 'reductionism is the dominant mental model'. It seems that in evolutionary terms, humans may have lost the ability to see the whole of things and work only on its parts. It fits with their analytical obsession. They even have expressions such as "cutting the elephant into pieces" and they fear the whole and have fallen in love with the parts and the pieces. They have experts and roles for each piece and their way of thinking seems to follow one single logic, "one thing at a time". They can't handle two, let alone two contradictory ideas at once. They are great at "breaking things down", but I am yet to come across a single human who is able to reconstruct from the pieces. They recruit people for analytical skills - never for synthesis skills - and what they called synthesis is a small and edited version of the analysis. The report continued; 'I have become interested in the human brain and discovered that it is strangely split into

two hemispheres, only connected by a kind of bridge called 'corpus callosum'. It doesn't make any sense, why are two parts connected, instead of a single one? Both seem to work with great coordination, but most of the things people do in daily life seem to belong to the functioning of the left hemisphere. It seems like the left has taken over the whole - information, facts, language, the explicit and all the mechanistic view of the world that I have seen around me. The concrete and predictable, order and control, things that their machines do well'. The extraterrestrial masters commented, "observations noted, but don't be distracted, you need to report back on everything. PS, there is an old chap in the Isle of Skye who has written all about this - if you have time, read his work - he is called Iain McGilchrist. Anyway, our plans for invasion are progressing, but we must confess we are a bit confused by what we hear from you and wonder if it's worth all the hassle. We wanted to take over an advanced civilisation not one that is going backwards. Please advise". The by-now acculturated alien left the consultancy firm - for reasons never made clear - but which may have to do with falling in love with the boss, something the firm declared was "not possible" in the employee manual. The very last report said: 'civilisation not evolved, signs of reversing in fact. On the issue of invasion, abort. Repeat, abort!'

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